

(Gifts) Determining Gifts

by Dwight Pentecost

Discovering and exercising spiritual gifts is the key to satisfaction and joy in Christian ministry.

Duration: 30:48

Scripture: Luke 9:57, Romans 12:6, Ephesians 4:11

Topics: "Gifts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal story of a young boy who approached him to ask about the missionaries listed in the bulletin. This encounter leads the speaker to discuss the importance of discovering and exercising one's spiritual gift. He emphasizes that every believer has a spiritual gift that is necessary and needed in the body of Christ. The speaker also shares his own love for singing and how using his gift brings him joy and satisfaction.

Transcript

A Body to Function. I say I believe this is one of the most important lessons that a child of God can learn. For few aspire to be pastors, few could hope to be seminary professors, few would be interested in becoming missionaries, few in a local assembly could aspire to the office of elder, and so most sit back and say, I'm not needed.

They're overwhelmed with a feeling of hopeless uselessness. We recognize that we owe God a debt of gratitude for what he has done for us, but because we do not visualize ourselves in some of the aforementioned ministries, we feel that we have no way of discharging our obligation to God, and we go on with an undischarged debt. Yet, the apostle taught a truth that every man has a spiritual gift, and that gift is necessary and needed.

And, I believe that if this is one of the greatest truths a believer and body of believers can learn, it is also a parallel truth that the greatest joy that a believer can find in his Christian life is the joy of discovering and then exercising his spiritual gift. For satisfaction comes from contributing something to the welfare of the body, and joy in one's Christian ministry comes from doing that which he has been equipped by the Spirit of God to do with profit and blessing to the other members of the body. Now, if I aspire to a spiritual gift for which I have not been gifted, and I try to exercise that gift, I'm bound to stumble and fall on my face.

I'm bound to fail because the energy of the flesh is no substitute for the empowerment by the Spirit of God. And, if I see a need and try to meet that need, and I am not gifted to meet that need, the need goes unmet,

and I go unsatisfied. In fact, I suffer the pangs of failure, and I compound my problem.

When I know what my spiritual gift is, and I exercise that gift, God's blessing is on the exercise of that gift, and there is benefit to the recipients of the ministry of that gift, and joy to the one who's exercising his gift. So, before we come to consider the fine gift which we want to do, we want to discuss with you tonight how one can know what his spiritual gift is. The Apostle has told us, as we have considered his teaching in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians chapter 4, there are a number of gifts that God has given that are called edifying gifts.

The edifying gifts are designed to build up the body numerically, as others shall reach for the truth of the word, but primarily building the members of the body up in faith and knowledge, maturing the members of the body so that the body can carry on the work of the ministry. I believe if one is to discover what his spiritual gift is, he begins with that which is of personal interest to him. I believe that is the starting point.

God could conceivably use a man in an area for which he had no interest, but often the lack of interest comes because of lack of ability. And so, if one would discover what his spiritual gift is, he would follow, first of all, the prompting of his own interest. The person, for instance, might have a love for children and a desire to communicate with them.

He enjoys being around children and enjoys seeing their little minds expand as they are taught the truth and they grasp it, and it satisfies him. And such a person might volunteer as a teacher of children. That would give an opportunity for the interested one to explore the possibility that this in which he is interested may be his spiritual gift.

Now, personal interest is not the criteria, because personal interest might arise from one's education, from one's background, from one's native ability, and these things do not of themselves constitute a spiritual gift, but it gives an opportunity for a person to explore what his spiritual gift is. I believe that many people do not know what their spiritual gift is because they've had no exposure. No opportunities have been sought to put their interest to a test to see whether they have a gift in that area or not.

My mind goes to an incident that is reported in the ninth chapter of Luke's gospel that I illustrate this, and I read in Luke 9.57, "...it came to pass that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee, whithersoever thou goest." Here is a man who is offering himself to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, one who shares Christ's authority and becomes a collaborer with Christ. He evidently had an interest in the Lord's work and an interest in becoming what some other men like Peter and James and John had become under the Lord's tutelage. So, he is coming to offer himself.

But what was our Lord's response? Jesus said unto him, "...the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." You see, our Lord discerned the motives of this man, and he hoped that he would share in our Lord's kingdom the bounties of our Lord's reign, that he would become a follower of Christ not only because of his personal interest in the ministry and to share the authority, but for the remuneration that might come to him from it. And our Lord is at words dismissed this man. It illustrates to me that a man could follow what is his personal interest, but God would not choose to use him in the light of his interest.

But this gave our Lord an opportunity to reveal that the man was not gifted to become the disciple of Christ that he had offered himself to be. To explore, to follow personal interest, gives an opportunity for evaluation by other members of the body, and that leads us to the second point that in the use of one's

interest, or in the pursuit of one's interest, others in the body can determine whether the one who has an interest in a certain ministry is gifted for that ministry. Let me illustrate.

I love to sing. I was brought up around a piano. In the very strict home in which I was brought up, normal pursuits were excluded on the Lord's day, and after the dinner dishes were done, the family would assemble around the piano.

We would spend the whole of Sunday afternoon going through, first of all, the hymn book and then to the gospel song book. We'd go through page after page. You know, it takes quite a few hymns to spend the whole Sunday afternoon doing it, but that was all I knew when I was growing up, and I grew up to love it.

And when I was a young teenager, I was in choirs and enjoyed the choir work and singing, glee clubs in college, and so on. You know, I sit up here on the platform behind Dr. Deibler and Mr. Bair, and I sing lustily, but I can't get them to invite me to sing so. For some reason, it has just never crossed their minds that that is a contribution I should make to great Bible church.

I am pursuing what is an interest to me, but in the evaluation of those in a position of authority in the assembly, they can determine that my point of interest is not my spiritual gift. So, they let me sing along with the congregation. That's the extent of it.

Now, when we put this into spiritual faith, the same thing is true. There are many, many different needs in an assembly of believers. We saw that there is a need for apostles, those who can be sent out to go to new areas to bring the gospel to people, to establish a church and organize them into a functioning body.

There is a need for prophets, those who can declare God's revealed truth. There is need for evangelists, those who can reach men and bring them to salvation. There is need for pastors and teachers.

There is need for those who have the gift of administration and oversight, those who have a gift of health, those who have the gift of giving, those who have the gift of showing mercy. These are all the edifying gifts, and a body of believers needs all of them. Now, as people begin to function in an assembly, those under God who are shepherds of the assembly can say, there's a man who can go to Mexico and head up the work among students.

Sweet Anderson demonstrated in his work among us here the gift that he had, and it was no problem for the elders of this assembly to commend Sweet to the work there, because he had been active in the work and the elders could see that he was gifted of God. There have been men who have come to us and who have said, I feel called of God to go to the mission field, and the board of elders has looked at the experience in the background. We find that they have done nothing, and they are presently doing nothing and are sitting around hoping that somebody will drop enough into their monthly support so that they can establish themselves on the field, and the board has declined.

Why? Because they have not demonstrated through youth that they have such a gift. The younger shepherds of a flock cannot look at an inactive person to determine what their gifts are. Only when the person is involved can it be determined whether that in which they are engaged is their gift, or whether they have gifts in another direction.

And I think that it becomes very important, as one is following his personal interest, to submit to the wisdom of the whole assembly of believers, and the elders or other shepherds who are over that flock. For it is my conviction that a fellowship of believers can determine what a man's gift is far more quickly than

the individual can himself. I was in seminary.

The philosophy that created the campus was, at least to put it this way, them what can does, them what can't teaches. I came to seminary determined to be a pastor, and I graduated to become a pastor, and I graduated with the resolution that the one thing I would never do was to teach. I hadn't been in my first pastor, but a matter of months when someone came to me and said, Pastor, you ought to be teaching a theological seminary.

I threw up my hands and heart, for that's what my wife had been telling me ever since I met her. Well, who believes his own wife? And I began to hear that thing over and over again. You ought to be a teacher.

And it wasn't until I had been in the ministry six years that an opportunity opened itself to teach when I was invited, along with a pastorate in the Philadelphia area, to come and teach part-time at the Philadelphia College of Bars. They didn't know whether I really had the gift of teaching or not, but they knew of personal interest, and so they were going to put that interest to use, and they assigned me an impossible course to teach for two hours. In the second semester, I taught four hours.

In the third semester, eight hours. In the fourth semester, 16 hours. Then I did that for a number of years, and they determined by my pursuit of my personal interest that I had the gift of teaching.

When I finished doctoral studies here, Dr. Walvoord evidently thought that I had gifts of teaching, because he invited me to join the faculty here. Now, I back up and say the one thing I said I would never do was to teach. I love the people, and I love the pastors, and I still do.

But I turn to the scripture and find out that pastor-teacher is a hyphenated word, and a shepherd-shepherd by teaching, so I think the two can be combined. Fine. That which I said I would never do and was not gifted for was recognized by the members of the congregation long before I ever consented to it or agreed to it.

And that establishes this principle that a fellowship of believers will probably recognize what a man's gift is before he recognizes it himself. So, the gift must be used, and this demonstrates the validity of the judgment, and then the assembly of believers can recognize his gift, and the recognition by the assembly, I believe, is determinative. Not my interest, or a job assigned to me that I happen to be making a success of, but I believe that the recognition by the assembly is definitive to what a man's spiritual gift is.

Now, repeat again, beloved. It becomes impossible for you or for anyone else to determine what your spiritual gift is if you are totally inactive. Follow some personal interest and offer yourself to the assembly for that in which you have an interest, and as there is opportunity to exercise that in which you are interested, the assembly can judge whether this is that for which you are a Christian.

I think we see this clearly illustrated in Acts 16. Paul was on his missionary journey, and he desired to take some along with him who were gifted as teachers, and he consulted the elders in the churches at Derbe and Lystra, and according to verse 2, Timothy was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra, Niconia. Now, we go into 2 Timothy 2, and we find that Timothy had known the scriptures from the time he was a youth.

Timothy had a personal interest in the scriptures. It becomes evident that because of his personal interest, Timothy had been teaching the scriptures, and it was as he followed his personal interest and used that interest, used that gift, that the church could make an evaluation and could determine that he was the

teacher that Paul needed. And if Timothy had not been actively pursuing that which was of interest to him, the elders would not have known that he had the gift of teacher and recommended him to Paul.

And Paul set Timothy apart to become a companion with him to travel as a teacher who followed Paul's work as an apostle and prophet, and this was possible because of him using his gift. Now, the question inevitably comes up, what's the relationship between natural abilities and spiritual gifts? Simply because a man has a natural ability, perhaps because of education and experience, let us say he is a teacher. That is no guarantee that the Spirit of God will use him as a teacher.

Because he has natural ability, it does not mean God will use him in that capacity. You see, there's a twofold aspect to this truth. God gives to each individual a spiritual gift, and then God gives that gifted person to the church.

There might be a dozen people, let us say, in the congregation tonight who have ability as teachers. You have studied, you have prepared yourself, you have had experience as a teacher. God might not use that natural ability in great Bible church so as to make you a gift, and God might take you with an ability and use you as a gift, or God might take a person who does not seem to have the ability or the education, the background, and give them a gift and use them.

The determinative factor is, what use will the Lord make of me in this fellowship in believing? What use will the Lord make of you? Don't ask yourself that question, what are my abilities? And shut the Lord up to using your ability. The question is not, what are my abilities? The question is, what use will God make of me? And God might take a man who has great abilities as a high school or college teacher, and God use them in the area of government or administration, or he might take such a one with such ability and use them to show mercy to the sick, the sorrow, the need. Or God might take such in one and give him the gift of giving, and use him entirely apart from his native abilities at all.

The question then is not, what are my abilities, but what use can God make of me? It will follow personal interest, but I suggest you put your personal interest to work and use that, and permit the assembly to evaluate the pursuit of your interest to see whether God would use you in that capacity. But above all, put yourself in God's hands and ask him, what use will you make of me? For when God chooses to use a man, he gifts the man, and then that man, in the pursuit of the use God intends to make of him, becomes God's gift to the church. I was speaking to people this morning at the close of the service, and a little fella came up to me, and when he could get my ear for a moment, he said, Panther, could I talk to you secretly for a minute? I said, sure, and I took him off into the conference room.

I think this lad, I would judge him to be seven years of age, and he said, uh, Dr. Picross, are you the one who put all these names in the back of the bulletin, and he referred to the list of missionaries? And I said, yes, I am. He said, Dr. Picross, I wish you would put my name there on the bulletin. I didn't quite know what he meant, and he said, I've looked down there, and I see that we don't have anybody in Highland Park, and he said, I live there, and I would like to be Grace Private Church's visionary to Highland Park.

And he said, I think I can be, because he said in the last couple weeks, I've led two of my classmates to accept the Lord as their Savior. He said, do you want me to tell you about it? I said, sure. He said, the last one was this last Friday, and I was playing with a Jewish fool, and I talked to him about the Lord Jesus, and I asked him if he would like to accept the Lord as his Savior, and he said, I started the back, and he said, I explained it all to him, and I finally asked him if he'd like to accept the Lord as his Savior, and he said he would.

So, I said to him, are you a Christian now? But this Jewish boy said, no, I'm not a Christian, I'm a Jew. So, he said, I explained it to him again, when he said, we got down on our knees on my front porch, and he asked Jesus to be his Savior, so he could become a Christian. The doctor then thought, don't you think I can be a missionary to Highland Park? I don't know what God has for that lad, but I'll tell you, as a shepherd of the sheep, responsible to determine spiritual gifts, my eyes on that boy, it didn't surprise me one bit that one day we'll have the privilege of sending him into the Lord's love.

He's using that which he believes God can use him to do. Are you doing this now? We pray, our Father, that the Spirit of God may give us a desire to be used for the building up of the body, and we pray that we might follow those interests we have to permit the Spirit of God to direct us into that use that he will make of us, that we might become gifts to the church, functioning by the Spirit's power. To dismiss us with the riches of thy grace and mercy and peace upon us, we pray in Jesus' name.

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